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May 14, 2004
*******FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*******

WYOMING DCI LEADS FIGHT AGAINST CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

CHEYENNE, Wyo. – The Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation has helped make possible a national law enforcement initiative aimed at combating the electronic distribution of child pornography, which has already identified thousands of suspect computers used to access the images.

Wyoming DCI Special Agent Flint Waters wrote the software that makes the initiative, known as Operation Peerless, possible. Operation Peerless is the first large-scale international proactive undercover operation by the Internet Crimes against Children task forces. It cracks down on the use of peer-to-peer (P2P) file trafficking networks for the distribution of child pornography.

“Law enforcement has a new tool to combat the targeting of our children for sexual exploitation,” Gov. Dave Freudenthal said. “As governor, and even more so as a parent, I am extraordinarily grateful for the work Special Agent Waters and the Wyoming DCI have done. Their dedication means that purveyors and users of child pornography might have fewer places to hide.”

Peer-to-peer applications make possible computer networks that have no server or central hub. All the networked PCs are equally able to act as a network server or client, and each client computer can talk to all the other computers without having to go through an access point or hub, which has historically made it difficult to track down sources of pornographic images.

But the software developed in Wyoming changes that. It works by searching P2P networks for known images of child pornography, verified through the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

U.S. Attorney Matt Mead commended the outstanding work of Waters and the Wyoming Internet Crimes against Children task force.

“The enforcement of child pornography laws are a top priority for the U.S. Attorney’s Office,” he said. “Through the efforts of Agent Waters, Wyoming DCI and Wyoming’s ICAC, we will continue to aggressively pursue those who exploit our children.”

In an effort to assist children, their families and law enforcement worldwide, Waters and Wyoming DCI shared the Operation Peerless computer program, free of charge, with local, state, federal and international law enforcement agencies. This software is central to the identification, location, and apprehension of the dozens of individuals, as discussed by U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft in a news conference earlier today.

“This problem was so widespread that it was clearly easier for a child to obtain these images than it would be for them to buy a magazine depicting adult pornography,” Attorney General Pat Crank said. “But through Operation Peerless, we have been able to leverage the resources of law enforcement around the world to serve not only Wyoming, but families worldwide.”

To date, more than 3,100 computers have been identified exchanging child pornography. Of these, nearly 2,000 were discovered by Wyoming DCI special agents.

In the United States alone, more than 200 search warrants have already been served targeting these computers. Each one represents at least one less computer that was actively distributing these images over the Internet. Additional warrants are underway.